

UK Patent Application (12) GB 2 365 571 (13) A

(43) Date of A Publication 20.02.2002

(21) Application No 0101333.3	(51) INT CL ⁷ G06F 17/60
(22) Date of Filing 18.01.2001	(52) UK CL (Edition T) G4A AUXX
(30) Priority Data (31) 09487963	(56) Documents Cited CA 002295423 A http://pages.ebay.co.uk/services/forum/feedback.html
(32) 18.01.2000 (33) US	
(71) Applicant(s) Valuestar Inc (Incorporated in USA - California) 360 - 2nd Street, Suite 210, Oakland, California, United States of America	(58) Field of Search UK CL (Edition S) G4A AUDB AUXF AUXX INT CL ⁷ G06F ONLINE: EPODOC, WPI, PAJ, INTERNET
(72) Inventor(s) James Stein	
(74) Agent and/or Address for Service J A Kemp & Co. 14 South Square, Gray's Inn, LONDON, WC1R 5JJ, United Kingdom	

(54) Abstract Title
System and method for realtime updating service provider ratings

(57) Service providers are evaluated and rated according to criteria that includes customer satisfaction with the services provided by the service provider. If the service provider meets and/or exceeds certain predetermined criteria, the service provider is certified, and a list of certified companies together with a satisfaction rating, is posted on an Internet Web Site maintained by the rating company for access by the consuming public. A member of the consuming public, wishing to use the service of a certified company, may register his/her credit card with the Rating Company. When the service is rendered, and paid for by the registered credit card, the payment is detected to trigger the sending of Internet e-mail to the consumer to solicit information as to the consumer's satisfaction with the service. A response to the Internet e-mail by the Rating Company is used to update on a real-time basis the customer satisfaction of the service provider that provided the service.

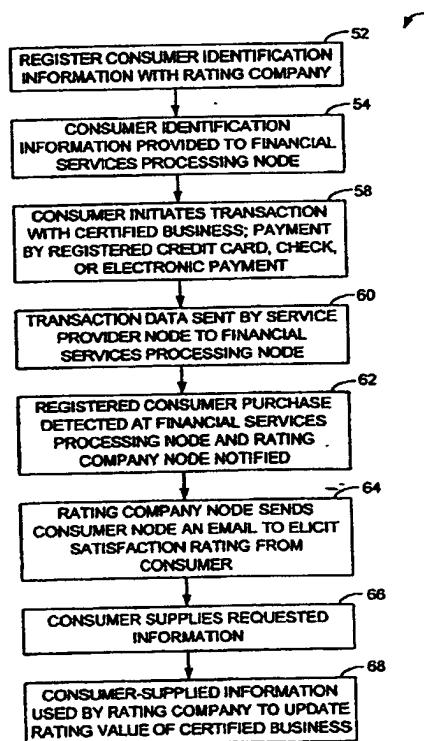


FIG. 4.

1/5

-3

2

SATHER GATE CATERING

**12567 Telegraph Ave.
Berkeley, CA 94512**

**tel: 510-775-5301
fax: 510-775-6301**

e-mail: catering@sgate.com

web: http://www.sgate.com

RATE THIS COMPANY
PLACE ORDER
ADVANCED SEARCH
NEW SEARCH

6

Legend		■ Credit Cards Accepted ● Schedule Online	
◆ Purchase Online ▲ Weekend & Night Appointments			
Category	Personal Services		Ratings
Subcategory	Catering		92%
Service Area	All Bay Area Counties	◆ ■	Current Monthly Rating for this company. Score range from 1 to 100.
Hours	10-6 pm M-F	●	Ratings based on customer satisfaction of products/ services received.
Availability	Weekends by appt. only	▲	259 Total # of rating this year
Years in Business	14		90% Average Yearly Rating
Employees	45		\$876 Average Purchase Amount
VS License	5841		
Owner's Name			

8

4

FIG. 1.

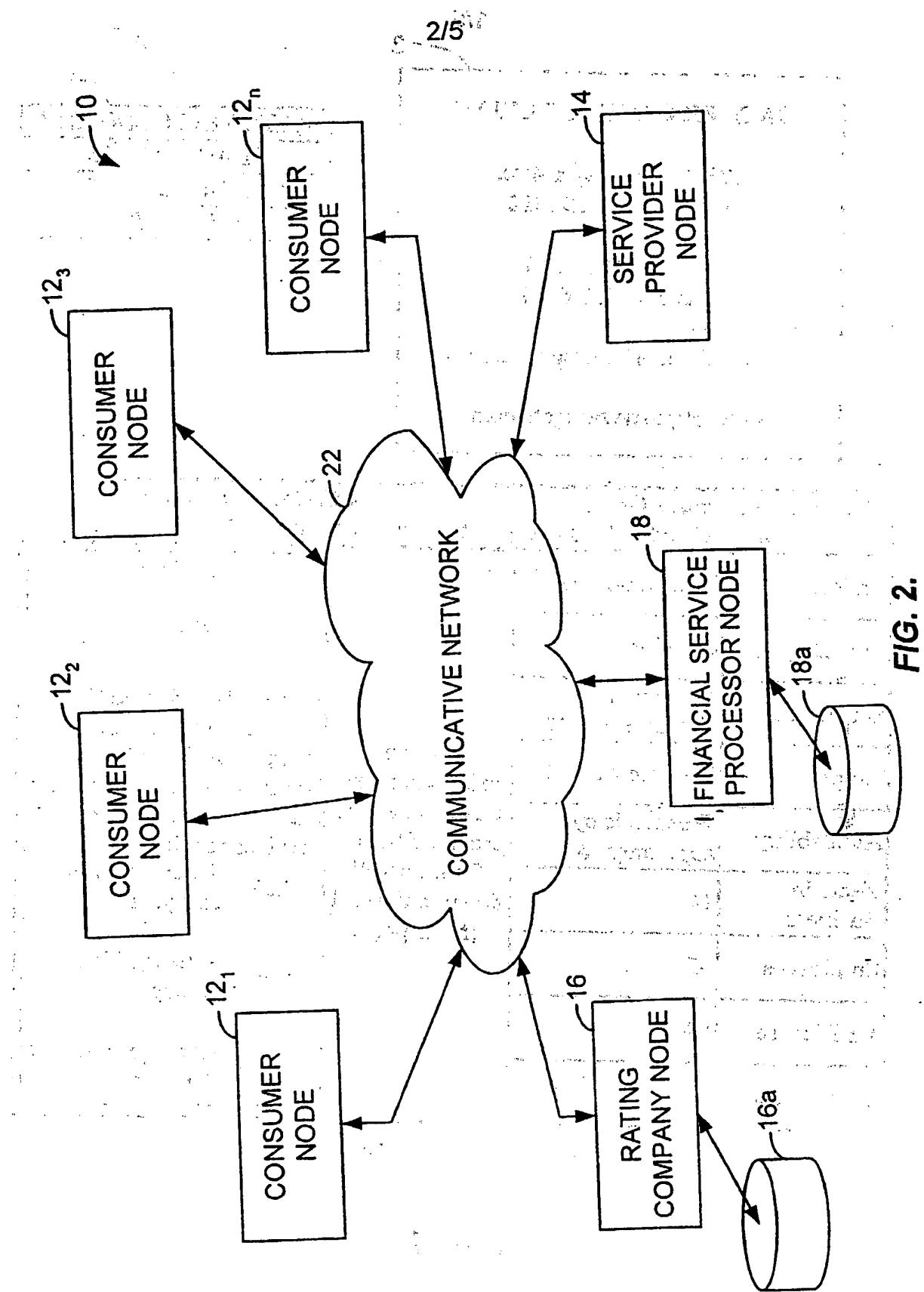


FIG. 2.

3/5 3.4

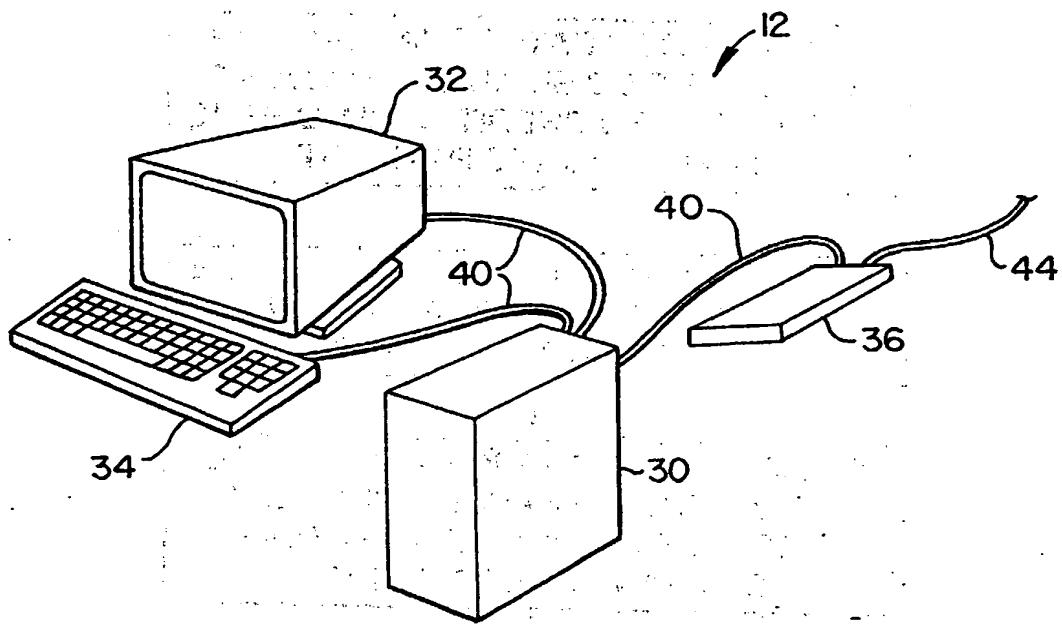


FIG. 3.

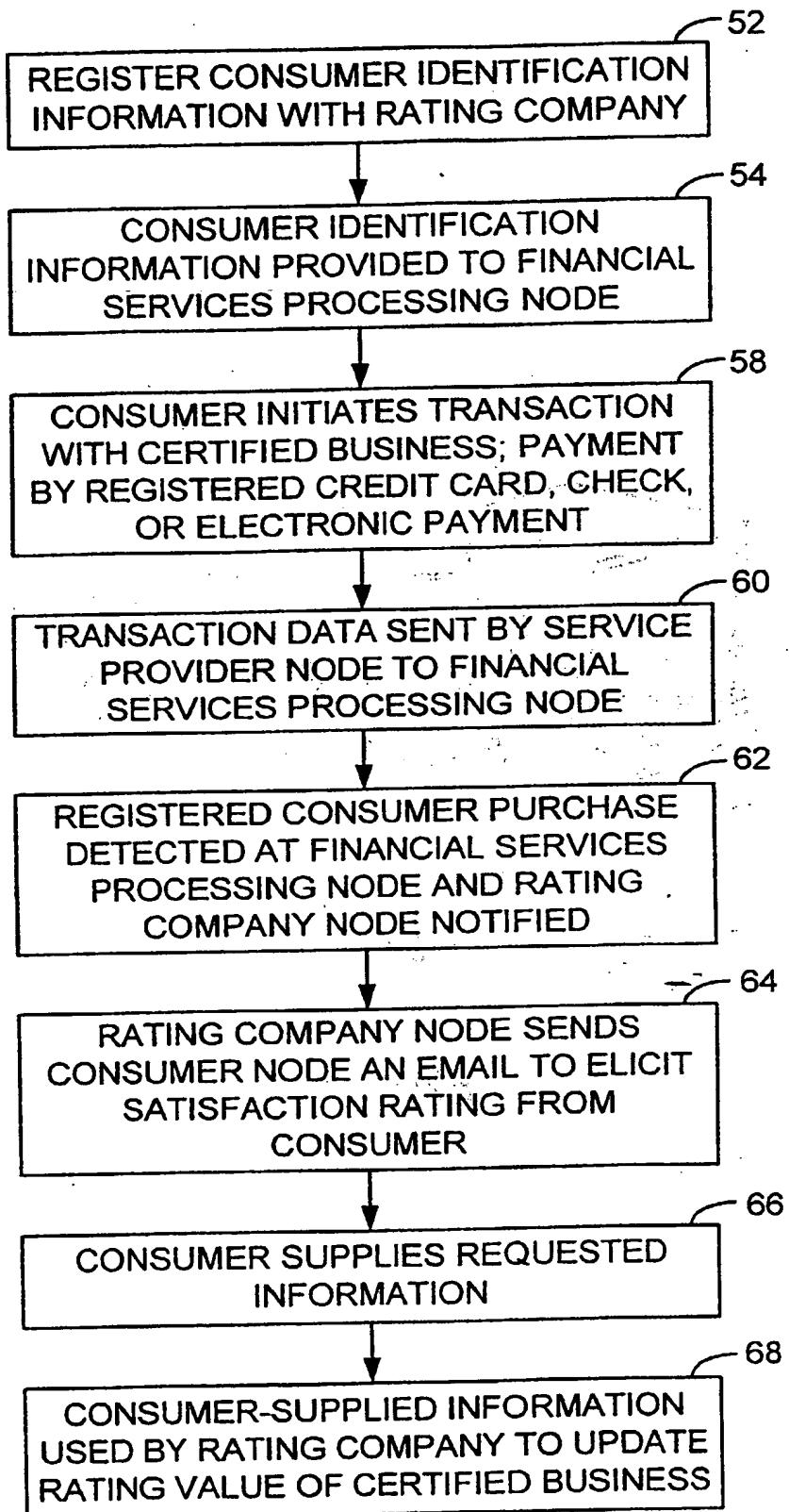


FIG. 4.

Rate This Company...

SATHER GATE CATERING

12567 Telegraph Ave.

Berkeley, CA 94512

tel: 510-775-5301

fax: 510-775-6301

e-mail: catering@sgate.com

web: http://www.sgate.com

80

82

YOUR INFORMATION

The information in this section has been auto filled from the database. If you find a error please update your account information before your place you next online order. To change any error in the information below simply select the type in the text box and retype the correct information. (Please note: changes made here do not update the ValueStar database)

Your Full Name

Address

City

State, Zip

Phone

Email

84

RATING QUESTIONS

Estimated Date of
Service/Product

[] / [] / []

Estimated Cost of
Service/Product

\$ []

Please rate the quality
of customer service
you received from this
company

- Excellent
- Above Average
- Average
- Fair
- Poor

86

Please rate the product/
service you received
from this company

- Excellent
- Above Average
- Average
- Fair
- Poor

88

If faced with a similar
project in the future
will you consider using
this company again?

- Yes
- Maybe
- No

90

Will you recommend
this company to
friends?

- Yes
- Maybe
- No

92

FIG. 5.

Attorney

SYSTEM AND METHOD FOR REAL-TIME UPDATING SERVICE
PROVIDER RATINGS

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

The present invention relates generally to a rating system that for gathering consumer feedback in order to rate businesses according to predetermined criteria. The 5 ratings information developed thereby is made available to members of the consuming public to allow them to make a selection of a local business based upon the customer satisfaction experiences of others. More particularly, the invention relates to a method, and a system for implementing that method, for updating the ratings on a real-time or near real-time basis, based on specific, verified transactions between consumers and 10 businesses.

When searching for a local service (i.e., anything from dentistry to window replacement to legal advice), the consuming public is often faced with a daunting array of choices. It is believed that approximately \$2 trillion is spent annually with six million or so service companies now doing business in America. Thus, searching through the 15 available services to find that one that best satisfies one's needs and expectations is not an easy task. One solution is to use the familiar "Yellow Pages" for a list of unselective self-promotions of various businesses and service providers. A better approach would be the recommendation of a friend or acquaintance, but this provides only a small sampling of satisfied (or not so satisfied) customers of the business in question.

Another alternative has been to turn to those who make available 20 evaluations and surveys through magazines, ranking various businesses and services according to predetermined criteria. One such evaluation system provides a rating scheme in which a satisfaction value is obtained through a sampling of a business' 25 customers. Coupled with the satisfaction value so developed from the sampling is an investigation that checks to ensure that the business in question has proper and appropriate "documentation" (i.e., licenses, insurance, and the like). Those businesses meeting a predetermined criteria of customer satisfaction and proper documentation are "certified," and lists of the certified companies are then made available to the consuming public, either in hard copy (e.g., a magazine) or via a Web page (see, e.g., 30 <http://valuestar.com>). Included in the lists, and associated with each certified company, is the customer satisfaction value generated by the evaluation process. In addition, the certified businesses are subjected to annual follow-up checks to ensure that they still meet

the criteria necessary for retention of the certification. Those who have let their customer satisfaction slip are removed.

However, the time-lapse between the annual follow-up checks of a certified business can present a problem. Businesses previously certified may become inattentive or otherwise not perform up to an expected level, thereby letting its customer satisfaction drop. Until the business is reevaluated it is still identified as being certified, keeping the customer satisfaction value it obtained prior to its slide, thereby misleading consumers.

Other ratings systems exist whereby consumers can register their opinions about particular service businesses over the Internet. Unfortunately, these systems allow consumers to volunteer ratings for businesses not recently, or indeed never, used by the particular consumer. Still other electronic ratings systems are tied to specific "e-commerce" transactions over the Internet. However, most local businesses reside in the "bricks and mortar" world. Accordingly, a system for tracking e-commerce transactions cannot possibly offer a statistically significant rating that is tied to verifiable transactions between consumers and businesses. Thus, there is need for updating a real time ratings system, particularly one that is based on specific, verified transactions local to the consumers.

20 SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

The present invention is a method for updating business ratings provided by an on-line consumer guide rating service on a real-time, or near real-time, basis. Thereby, a consumer using the on-line consumer guide to look for a service can be relatively sure that the customer rating value of the service rendered by a service provider business in question is as current as possible.

25 Broadly, the invention involves identifying a transaction between a customer and service provider soon after the transaction is consummated and paid for, and sending the customer a communication that solicits the customer's satisfaction of the service provided through the transaction. One embodiment of the invention uses a communication medium, including a conventional Internet connection, to communicatively interconnect the customer, the service provider business, the Rating Company and a Financial Service Processor (e.g., bank or credit card processing company). Using the Internet connection, the customer registers a financial services account number (e.g., a credit card number or a checking account number) with the

Rating Company. A database containing this customer's financial services account number together with those of other similarly registered customers or buyers is forwarded to and stored by the Financial Service Processor. The Rating Company also supplies the Financial Service Processor with the merchant numbers of all the service providers certified by it – either by inclusion in the database containing customer financial services account numbers, or in a separate database. Then when a register customer makes a purchase of a service from a certified service provider, and pays for that service with a credit card or check or other electronic payment means tied to a financial services account number previously registered with the Rating Company, that purchase will be detected at the Financial Service Processor. The Financial Service Processor notifies the Rating Company of the purchase. This notification will trigger the transmission of an email to the customer with a simple electronic form that asks for information concerning the customer's satisfaction of the service received. Upon receipt of the filled-out form, the Rating Company updates the database containing the information about the business.

In another embodiment of the invention, the Rating Company may contract with particular Financial Service Processors such as a bank or credit card company to register all its customer checking or credit card accounts, and supply the account numbers of the customers to the Rating Company. The Rating Company may then supply the Financial Service Processor with flyers to send to its customers, notifying them of registration and of the rewards (e.g., frequent flyer miles) of using companies certified by the Rating Company. The customer, should he/she choose to reply to the flyer, will supply the same information as described above, i.e., a financial services account number of one type or another (e.g., credit card number), and email address.

A number of advantages are achieved by the present invention. The invention retrieves the satisfaction of a customer while the recollection of the service provided is still fresh in the customer's mind. Also, using the recollection to update the satisfaction "quotient" of a business provides a realistic, real-time rating of the business.

These and other advantages and aspects of the invention will become apparent to those skilled in this art upon a reading of the following description of the invention, which should be taken in conjunction with the accompanying drawings.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

Fig. 1 is an illustration of a Web page of an Internet Web site;

Fig. 2 broadly illustrates a system for implementing the present invention;

Fig. 3 illustrates a computing system as may be used by a consumer to register with a service provider for receiving email solicitations to rate the satisfaction of a business;

Fig. 4 is a flow diagram broadly outlining the steps used for implementing the method of the present invention; and

Fig. 5 is an illustration of a form as may be used for eliciting information as to how satisfied a customer was with services provided by a business.

DESCRIPTIONS OF SPECIFIC EMBODIMENTS

10

The particular consumer guide to which the present invention is directed is in both a magazine and on-line form. It is the on-line form that the invention finds particular use. The assignee of the present invention is a rating company that rates service provider businesses based upon: (1) a check of the appropriate complaint bureaus to see what, if any, consumer complaints have been lodged against the service provider with the bureau; (2) checks to verify that the service provider carries the necessary state licenses for the services it offers; (3) a check to verify the service provider's certificates of insurance; and (4) a survey of a sampling of the service provider's customers to determine how satisfying the customers found the services were, to obtain therefrom a customer satisfaction rating. If these checks and verifications reach and/or exceed a predetermined standard, the service provider is "certified," and put into a list of similarly certified service providers. The list of certified service providers is then made available to the consuming public.

20

The on-line version of the list, accessible via a searchable Internet Web site (with the consumer using proper Internet connection equipment, such as is illustrated in Fig. 4, and an appropriate browser), is the preferred form. As with many Web sites, the on-line version of the consumer guide allows a consumer/prospective customer to search the site according to criteria selected by the consumer, and according to what type of service the consumer is looking for. The site may provide information about a certified company that may fit the need of the consumer in a form similar to that shown in Fig. 1.

25

Assume that a consumer is looking to hire a catering service for a planned party or other function. The consumer logs onto the Rating Company's on-line consumer guide Internet Web site, and performs a search. The search delivers a list of several catering services in the consumer's geographical area that meet the consumer's needs,

ranked by the ratings that those caterers had received from previous consumers. The consumer can select one or more of them for more information, being ultimately directed to a Web page that provides pertinent information about the business. Fig. 1 is an example of such a Web page, designated generally as 2, illustrating in simplified form the information that may be provided by such a search. As Fig. 1 illustrates, the Web page 2 includes an identification field 3 that contains the name, address, telephone number and other contact information (e.g., email address) of the business – here a catering service. Also provided, in a field 5, is information concerning the area of operation, hours of operation, etc. A field 6 provides hyperlink connections to other pages that allow the consumer to rate the company, providing a Web page such as that shown in Fig. 5, or a link that brings the consumer to an order Web page, allowing the consumer to order services on-line if desired. In particular, the Web page 2 of Fig. 1 provides a customer satisfaction rating 8 in field 4.

Referring now to Fig. 2, there is shown a system designated generally with the reference numeral 10 that includes a number of nodes 12, 14, 16, and 18. Much of consuming public owns personal computers with connection for electronic communication via the Internet. This is represented by the "Consumer nodes" 12 (12₁, 12₂, ..., 12_n). The "Service Provider" node 14 generally represents a service provider (e.g., dentists, contractor, cabinetmaker, dry cleaning, etc.). A "Rating Company" 16, i.e., a company that evaluates and rates service providers as described above, is shown at 16. Preferably, the Rating Company 16 will have the capability of electronic communication with the Consumer nodes 12 for reasons that will become clear below. A Financial Service Processor node 18, preferably also communicatively coupled to the Rating Company and to the Service Provider node 16, completes the system 10.

As used herein, a Financial Service Processor (FSP) is a financial payment service of one type or another. For example, an FSP may be a bank with which the service provider does business, or with which a customer has a checking account, or it may be a credit card processing company. Alternatively, it may be an on-line payment service, or it may be a check verification service. As will be seen, any of these services will operate with the present invention.

Continuing with Fig. 2, various nodes 12-18 are shown communicatively interconnected by a "communicative network" 22. Preferably, the Consumer nodes 12 and Rating Company node 16 are Internet capable; i.e., they use the Internet to communicate with one another by both email and a Web site run by the Rating Company

16). This means that Rating Company node 16 will preferably have the necessary instrumentality to provide Internet Web site access to company rating and evaluation information for consumers. The Internet Web site will preferably also allow the consumers to supply a modicum of information about themselves for registration purposes.

5 There need not be a communicative interconnection between the Service Provider node 14 and the Rating Company node 16 or Consumer nodes 12 for application of the present invention. It is preferable, however to have a communicative connection between the Service Provider node 14 and the FSP node 18. This latter connection is 10 preferably by a dedicated line or other secure connection for data transfer involving transactions consummated by the Service Provider Node and consumers (i.e., the business at the node). Similarly, the communicative connection between the Rating Company node 16 and the FSP node 18 is preferably a secure line of one sort or another.

15 Thus, the communicative network 22 symbolizes an aggregate of communicative interconnections commonly used in today's commerce and as may exist or be available between the nodes 12-18.

As Fig. 2 illustrates, the FSP node 18 maintains a database 18_a whereat is kept consumer financial information (i.e., credit card numbers or checking account numbers) that is searchable for processing payment of a commercial transaction by credit 20 card or check or other on-line payment by the consumer. The database 18_a will also have a Service Provider Number. Similarly, the Rating Company node 16 typically includes a data processing system (not shown) that includes the capability of providing a server function for Internet operations (i.e., email and provision of a Web site). Alternatively, of course, the Rating Company node 16 could use the services on an Internet service 25 provider (ISP; not shown) to host the web site. The Rating Company node also includes a database 16_a that contains the business rating and evaluation information available for Internet access by consumers (or others). The database will also maintain consumer information, including email addresses, according to the present invention as described more fully below. In addition, the database will include, for each certified service 30 provider, the "merchant number" of the service provider (or merchant numbers if the service provider has more than one). A merchant number is that identification assigned a service provider by the bank with which the service provider does business. If the service provider does business with more than one financial institution (e.g., with one bank for

credit card transactions, and another for banking), then the service provider will have more than one merchant number.

Referring now to Fig. 3, there is at least one version of a configuration of computing apparatus as may be found at a consumer node 12, shown here as consumer node 12_j. As shown, the node 12_j includes a main cabinet 30 that houses the principle processing system, including a central processing unit and various peripheral equipment such as floppy and hard drives, CD ROM readers, and the like. The processing system connects to a CRT monitor 32, keyboard 34, and a communication device 36 by appropriate cables 40. The consumer node 12_j may also include a conventional pointing device (e.g., mouse or track ball; not shown) of one sort or another for point-and-click selection operations. The communication device 36 preferably provides Internet access (via an appropriate ISP) and may take the form of a standard modem connection to the telephone lines 44. Alternatively, the communication device may be of a type that provides ISDN, DSL, ASDL, cable, or even a satellite dish connection.

The consumer node 12_j could be a conventional television set with a WebTV connection rather than the PC system shown in Fig. 3. (WebTV is a registered trademark of Microsoft Corporation of Redmond Washington.) Whatever the configuration used, the consumer node 12_j preferably has both email and Internet capability, but at a minimum email capability.

The Rating Company node 16 will make available to the consuming public, via its Internet Web site, the identification and a relative rating of the various service providers it has evaluated – based upon on information gathered by the Rating Company. Such information may include a listing of those service providers found to have met and/or exceeded predetermined criteria set by the Rating Company, including a customer satisfaction value indicative of the satisfaction of those consumers who have purchased or have been provided with the services rendered by the service provider. A real-time updating of the customer satisfaction value of the service provider is an object of the present invention according to the steps outlined in the flow diagram illustrated in Fig. 4. It is also possible that the ratings could be made available to the consuming public via other portals or ecommerce Web sites that would recompense the Rating Company for the rights to display the Ratings information.

Fig. 4 illustrates the major steps that may be taken to update customer satisfaction ratings according to the present invention. That update process may begin with step 52 when a consumer, from one of the consumer nodes 12, e.g., consumer node

12_j (Figs. 1 and 2), logs onto the Internet to access the Web site maintained by the Rating Company node 16. The Web site may include a "registration" page at which a consumer, from the consumer node 12_j, supplies personal information, including an email address and a credit card number of the credit card that may be used in a commercial transaction.

5 This information will be used later, as described below, to identify a service purchased from a company that has been certified by the Rating Company to identify the transaction and prompt an email request for information as to the satisfaction of the consumer.

The information provided by the consumer to the Rating Company is placed in the database 16_a, maintained by the Rating Company node 16. The list of service providers certified by the Rating Company will also be in the database 16_a, together with the merchant number(s) of each certified service provider, or the list may have previously been sent to the FSP node separately for storage in the database 18_a. And, step 54 sees the Rating Company node 16 forwarding certain portions of the information provided by the consumer, such as the consumer's credit card number or bank account number to the FSP node and placed in the database 18_a. This will allow the FSP to correlate certified service providers (by the associated merchant number(s)) from whom services have been purchased with credit cards or checks or on-line payments drawn on checking accounts that have been registered with the Rating Company node 16.

At step 58, a transaction is consummated between a consumer and one of the service providers certified by the Rating Company involving payment with the credit card whose number was previously registered with the Rating Company node 16. The credit card transaction data is transmitted, in step 60, and via the communicative network 22 (e.g., via a dedicated line), to the FSP node 18 for payment. The FSP node will search its database 18_a for a credit card number that matches that used for the transaction with the particular (certified) service provider. This search will detect the credit card number previously registered by the consumer in step 52. It will also detect that the transaction occurred with a certified service provider by the merchant number associated with the information that was conveyed to the FSP.

Having detected use of a registered credit card or check or on-line payment tied to a registered bank account for a transaction with a certified company, the FSP node 18 will electronically notify the Rating Company node 16, providing the Rating Company with an identification of the registered consumer's credit card number or bank account number (step 62), the merchant number associated with the service provider involved in the transaction, the date of the transaction, and the amount of payment. This notification

will, in turn, prompt the Rating Company node 16 to conduct a search of its database 16, for information related to the credit card number or bank account number, and find the information previously provided by the consumer, including the consumer's e-mail address. This, at step 64, will prompt the sending of a form email by the Rating Company node 16 to the consumer node 12. The email from the Rating Company node could include a form similar to that shown in Fig. 5, or the email may include a URL that provides a link to a Web page having the same form. The form, as can be seen in Fig. 5 solicits information from the consumer as to how satisfied the consumer was with the service purchased. Alternatively, it is also possible, for certain consumers that do not have access to the Internet, for the Rating Company to automatically call the consumer by telephone to obtain a satisfaction opinion from the consumer.

10 Preferably, however, the form would be much simpler than that illustrated in Fig. 5. To ensure as much as possible that there will be a reply, the answers to only

15 two questions may be requested, followed by a request for a more detailed response if the consumer so desires. The two questions may be:

1. On a scale of 1 to 10, 1 being very dissatisfied and 10 being very satisfied, how do you feel about the value you've received most recently from the [identified service provider]?
2. Would you recommend this merchant to others (Y/N)?

20 Both questions need not be answered in the same manner to be counted.

The answers to these questions are then used to develop the satisfaction rating for the service provider, using the following relation:

$$\text{Rating} = (.5 \times \text{Satisfaction Rating (from 0 to 10)} \times 10) + (.5 \times \text{Recommend to a Friend (0 for no, 100 for yes)}).$$

25 For example, if the response were that the service provider would be recommended to a friend with a rating of 8 out of 10, the score would be:

$$\text{Rating} = (.5 \times 8 \times 10) + (.5 \times 100) = 40 + 50 = 90$$

30 The consumer may be asked for more detailed information, such as illustrated in Fig. 5 which shows an exemplary screen portion of what would be sent or otherwise made accessible (e.g., as by a link embedded in an email to the consumer node 12) to the consumer, to illicit such additional or more detailed information. The screen, designated generally by the reference numeral 80, contains an informational field 82 and

five major entry fields 84-92. As can be seen, the informational field 84 identifies the service provider for which a satisfaction rating is being requested of the consumer.

Entry field 84 provides the certain of the consumer identification information for review and correction by the consumer. Entry fields 86, 88, 90, and 92 5 request information concerning how satisfied the consumer was with the transaction between the consumer and the service provider being rated. The information supplied via the entry fields 86-92 will, when received by the Rating Company node 16, be assimilated into the satisfaction rating value accorded the particular service provider, adjusting that value accordingly, and posting this adjusted value to the database 16; for the service 10 provider in question.

Thus, in Step 66, the consumer reads the e-mail, provides at least some of the information requested (a satisfaction factor) and, if he/she chooses to respond, sends a reply e-mail, with the information supplied, back to the Rating Company node 16. Upon receipt by the Rating Company, the information at least pertaining to a satisfaction factor 15 is extracted from the reply, and the database 16, accessed for the rating information for the service provider with which the consumer dealt. The satisfaction value for that service provider is updated by the information supplied by the consumer, and the updated value returned to the database 16, for posting to the Web site maintained by the Rating Company node 16 (step 70).

20 An alternative to asking the consumer to take affirmative steps to registration of his or her credit card number would be for the Rating Company node 16 to negotiate agreements with certain partner financial institutions to automatically register the credit cards (and/or checking accounts – see below) of all or a group of their customers. The Rating Company could then provide the financial institution with 25 marketing materials to be sent to the credit card holders to inform them that the credit cards have been "registered" with the Rating Company 16, and that purchases from those companies "certified" by the Rating Company node will provide certain advantages (e.g., dispute mediation, limited guarantees, etc.). The credit card holder is asked to fill out the a form included in the materials, or otherwise contact the Rating Company, to supply an 30 email address which is placed in the database 16. Then, when a transaction is entered with such a certified company, and paid for with the "registered" credit card, it can be detected at the FSP (who will have been provided this information by the Rating Company, as described above). The FSP may then notify the Rating Company node 16 of the transaction to prompt the email delivery as also described above.

Alternatively, for those consumers desiring to pay for services by check, a checking account number can be registered with the Rating Company in the same manner as described above for registering credit card numbers. In this case, the FSP may be the service provider's bank, or a check verification service, or a payment service in the case 5 of on-line payments (e.g., on-line banking).

A further alternative, for those consumers that do not make payment for a transaction with a credit card, and/or who do not register beforehand, may be to have the Service Provider node 14 obtain the consumer's email address at the time of the transaction (or any other time for that matter), and send (e.g., by facsimile transmission) 10 the consumer's email address to the Rating Company node 16. Or, the consumer may register the transaction by sending information of the transaction to the Rating Company node 16 (again, by a facsimile transmission, or by calling an "800" number).

In a yet further alternative of the invention, should the consumer wish to register a transaction that is paid for using cash or unregistered credit cards or checking 15 accounts, the consumer may register the transaction manually using the Rating Company's web site. By providing information such as the Service Provider's Merchant number and the date and size of the transaction, the Rating Company can double-check the validity of the transaction through an email or fax communication to the Service Provider. Verified transactions will result in a real-time updating of the Service 20 Provider's satisfaction level, just as it would for automated transactions described above.

While the present invention has been described in terms of various embodiments, it will be apparent to those skilled in this art that various modifications and alterations can be made. For example, rather than having the consumer register through 25 the on-line Web site, as described above, the consumer can register when the services are purchased by the service provider. The service provider would then forward to the Rating Company the email identification so that an email can be sent to solicit the consumer's satisfaction of the services rendered. A further alternative could be to register the consumer's bank account number so that, in the event the service obtained is paid for by 30 check, the bank will detect that payment and notify the Rating Company accordingly. Finally, the consumers could register these services by telephone, or be automatically called by the Rating Company to register his ratings opinion, as described above.

Therefore, although the invention has been described in terms of several specific embodiments, it should be understood that the invention is not limited to the

disclosed embodiments. To the contrary, the present invention is intended to cover various modifications and equivalent structures included within the spirit and scope of the appended claims

CLAIMS

1 1. In a system for providing information indicative of customer
2 satisfaction respecting at least one service provider, the system including at least one
3 processing node that maintains a database containing the customer satisfaction
4 information and a number of input nodes, including a customer node, communicatively
5 coupled to the processing unit, a method for updates to the information by a customer of
6 the one service provider that includes the steps of:

7 detecting a transaction between the customer and the one service provider
8 to communicate information concerning the transaction together with an identification of
9 the customer;

10 receiving at the processing unit the information and customer
11 identification to communicate a query respecting customer satisfaction of the transaction
12 to the customer node;

13 inputting at the customer node, in response to the query, update
14 information concerning the one service provider to communicate the update information
15 to the processing node; and

16 accessing the database to update the customer satisfaction information
17 with update information.

1 2. The method of claim 1, including preceding the detecting step with
2 providing a customer identification to the processing unit.

1 3. The method of claim 2, wherein the customer identification is a
2 credit card number.

1 4. The method of claim 3, wherein the step of associating the
2 customer identification includes a payment by the customer to the one service provider
3 using by a credit card.

1 5. The method of claim 4, wherein the step of associating the
2 customer identification further includes the steps of
3 registering the customer identification with a Financial Service Processor
4 system having a storage facility to maintain a customer database;
5 transmitting information concerning the credit card transaction to the
6 credit card system entity that maintains a customer database;

detecting the payment to the one service provider by use of the credit card

6. A method of updating information respecting service providers and provided for viewing on an Internet web site with update information from a customer regarding a transaction between the customer and one of the service providers, including the steps of:

registering the means of payment to be used by the customer in the transaction:

detecting use of the payment means as payment in the transaction:

communicating a request for update information to the customer.

respecting the transaction: and

receiving from the customer the update information to modify the

7. The method of claim 6, wherein the registering step includes providing a credit card number as the payment means

8. The method of claim 6, wherein the registering step includes providing a checking account identification as the payment means.

9. The method of claim 8, wherein the payment is an on-line payment.

10. In a system for gathering and maintaining in a database information

describing customer satisfaction of service providers, including a first service provider, a method of updating the information following a transaction between the first service provider and a customer.

11. A method as hereinbefore described with reference to and as illustrated in the accompanying drawings

12. A system as hereinbefore described with reference to and as illustrated in the accompanying drawings.



Application No: **GB 0101333.3**
Claims searched: **1-12**

Examiner: **Matthew Cope**
Date of search: **3 December 2001**

Patents Act 1977

Search Report under Section 17

Databases searched:

UK Patent Office collections, including GB, EP, WO & US patent specifications, in:

UK Cl (Ed.S): **G4A: AUDB, AUXF, AUXX**

Int Cl (Ed.7): **G06F**

Other: **ONLINE: EPODOC, WPI, PAJ, INTERNET**

Documents considered to be relevant:

Category	Identity of document and relevant passage	Relevant to claims
E,A	CA 2295423 MACELLAN - Whole doc relevant	
X	http://pages.ebay.co.uk/services/forum/feedback.html (1999)	1 at least

X	Document indicating lack of novelty or inventive step	A	Document indicating technological background and/or state of the art.
Y	Document indicating lack of inventive step if combined with one or more other documents of same category.	P	Document published on or after the declared priority date but before the filing date of this invention.
&	Member of the same patent family	E	Patent document published on or after, but with priority date earlier than, the filing date of this application.

This Page Blank (uspto)

**This Page is Inserted by IFW Indexing and Scanning
Operations and is not part of the Official Record**

BEST AVAILABLE IMAGES

Defective images within this document are accurate representations of the original documents submitted by the applicant.

Defects in the images include but are not limited to the items checked:

BLACK BORDERS

IMAGE CUT OFF AT TOP, BOTTOM OR SIDES

FADED TEXT OR DRAWING

BLURRED OR ILLEGIBLE TEXT OR DRAWING

SKEWED/SLANTED IMAGES

COLOR OR BLACK AND WHITE PHOTOGRAPHS

GRAY SCALE DOCUMENTS

LINES OR MARKS ON ORIGINAL DOCUMENT

REFERENCE(S) OR EXHIBIT(S) SUBMITTED ARE POOR QUALITY

OTHER: _____

IMAGES ARE BEST AVAILABLE COPY.

As rescanning these documents will not correct the image problems checked, please do not report these problems to the IFW Image Problem Mailbox.

This Page Blank (uspto)